



Franklin Pierce School District

Success in the last year of middle school Part One

Eighth Grade: Preparing for the transition to high school and beyond

Important things to know about— Getting your 8th grader ready

- What's "normal" in the 8th grade.
- Positive roles, risks, and responsibilities.
- Why math skills = high school success.
- How parents and family members can help.

What's going on with your 8th grader?

Life at age 13 can be boring, exciting, frightening, and confusing—all at once. It's a time of amazing transitions. This chart gives you a snapshot of where your 8th grader is likely to be:

Physical	Girls at 95% of height & weight. Boys' voices are starting to change, growth spurt is about a year behind girls'. Skin problems emerging. Body image is a big concern: the mirror is "best friend and worst enemy." High physical energy. Interest in sports is growing.
Mental / Academic	Abstract thinking and reasoning <i>begins</i> . Challenges adults' ideas and authority. Growing interest in issues of fairness and justice. Starting to focus on particular subjects that they like best. Write better than they speak. Inward focus means students may not participate well in class discussion. Worries about schoolwork.
Social	Quieter than age 12 or age 14. Feelings are easily hurt. "Mean = scared." Music is a major focus. Doesn't do well in cooperative groups but works well with a single partner. Peer pressure increasing: must be seen as "cool."
Personal Identity	Tends to be self-critical. Sensitivity and withdrawn behavior are protecting new ideas and self-concepts that aren't fully formed yet. Beginning to see issues and problems from many sides and form own ideas and solutions.
Family Relationships	Starting to challenge parents' authority; hyper-concerned with fairness.

Based on Chip Wood, *Yardsticks: Children in the Classroom*
Ages 4-14, 2004.

It's important to remember that what looks like boredom or indifference is really their frustration at not being seen for who they are ***becoming***. The most common complaint of this age is: "They treat us like kids. We may not be adults yet, but we aren't kids any more!"

Adults can help 8th graders explore who they are and who they are becoming by allowing them to express their values and beliefs to family, friends, and teachers. It's also very important that these not-children-not-adults begin testing themselves in the larger world—that's a key part of their preparation for high school and adult life.

Roles, risks, and responsibilities

We used to talk about the "three R's" of Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic. If we fix up the spelling, those are still the absolutely essential academic skills for children to master. But there are three more "R's" that are crucial in helping teens mature and find the motivation to succeed in school and in life:

Real roles: Help your 8th graders find useful tasks that interest them and will help them express their idealism and creativity. They want to fix the whole world. Encourage them!

Real risks: Your 8th grader is ready for real-life situations that provide opportunities, build skills, stretch, and grow. We want our children to take the ***right kind*** of risks, of course—such as trying out for a new sport; taking a leadership role in school, church, or community; or taking a challenging subject instead of a "slam-dunk" class. Also, make sure they are choosing, facing, and learning from their own mistakes: ***if you try to rig the outcome for them, they haven't taken a real risk.***

Real responsibilities: Real responsibilities are useful activities that other people depend on. Some might be household chores; some might be volunteer work at school, at church, or in the community—something that helps others. Your 8th grader should be taking more and more responsibility, needing less and less direction and reminding. Finding the right level of help with time management is a tricky challenge for a parent. Try not to nag, but do praise your children for carrying out the responsibility, mentioning all the people who rely on them for it.

Talk to your children about their roles, risks, and responsibilities. Make opportunities for them to try new ones, and discuss the skills they learn there. Roles, risks, and responsibilities help prepare middle schoolers to make the jump to high school.

Math really counts for middle school and high school success!

One of the best things we can do for our middle-school children is to get them onto the math track and keep them there. Starting today, encourage your teenager to take heaping helpings of math.

Why? Because we know that math skills are crucial for success in high school and beyond. Here's the story that the research tells us:

- More than half of today's high school graduates don't have the math skills needed in today's job market.
- More than 80% of the middle-and high-school students who take algebra and geometry enroll in college. Fewer than 42% of the students who don't take algebra and geometry go on beyond high school.
- Among low-income middle- and high-school students, 71% of those who take algebra and geometry enroll in college, and only 27% of those who don't take algebra and geometry go on beyond high school.
- Minority students who master algebra and geometry in high school succeed in college at almost the same rate as white students.

And the time to prepare for high-school math classes is right **now**, in 8th grade. Make sure your children are studying math in middle school: this is a jump-start into high-school math. And make sure they are **understanding** the math they are studying now.

Math is taught in steps. If a student gets lost at an early step, it will be very, very difficult to catch up later. If your child seems to be struggling, ask the teacher or a counselor for ideas about how to help.

A lot of middle-school students want to “drop out” of math too early. They decide it is too hard, or boring, or not connected to what they think of as real life. They don't know how critical math will be to their future success.

So your assignment as a parent is to encourage your child to take all the math, science, and tech courses available in middle school and to keep taking those subjects all the way through high school. Bring math—calculations, percentages, costs, estimates—into conversation whenever you can. Talk about how important math is to whatever jobs and careers your child shows interest in. Help your middle schooler understand that mastering math skills keeps the doors of opportunity open all through adult life.

How parents and families can help

You can see that there's a lot going on with your children at this age and a lot that you can be doing to help them prepare for high school. Learning to listen is among the most important parenting skills to help 8th graders meet all the significant personal, social, and academic challenges they face. The major roles of adults are to:

- Help children understand who they are and what they are becoming;
- Listen to them and take them seriously as they explore their newly forming identities;
- Continue coaching them about organization, time management, study skills, and step-by-step planning for assignments and activities;
- Help them see the connections between what they are doing and learning now and the careers they want to explore in the future. These connections help them understand the importance of building strong skills early.

Ask your child—

Out of all the chores and activities you do, what's your favorite?

Is there an adult job you wish you could do right now? Which one? Why?